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Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 070915Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8209
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0913

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID PFOR PORG LA US
SUBJECT: MENNONITE RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVES TO REMAIN IN LPDR

REF: VIENTIANE 0815

SUMMARY: THE LPDR HAS REVERSED ITS DECISION TO REQUEST MENNONITE RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVES TO QUIT LAOS. A HIGH RANKING MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICIAL REPORTEDLY ASKED MENNONITE AND QUAKER RESREPS TO ACT AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO LAOS AND BRIEFED THEM ON LPDR OFFICIAL VIEWS REGARDING US MIA'S , AID AND OUTSIDE HELP TO "REACTIONARY ELEMENTS."

1. SINCE MAY 11 WHEN THE LPDR ASKED MENNONITE RESREPS TO QUIT LAOS, (REFTEL) GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE RE-EVALUATED THE MENNONITE PROGRAM AND NOW FEEL IT IS WORTH KEEPING, ACCORDING TO MENNONITE RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE AMCIT LINDA HEIBERT. HEIBERT TOLD EMBOFF THAT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS NOUPHAN SITHPASAY MET JUNE 2 WITH MENNONITE AND QUAKER RESREPS TO EXPLAIN THE LPDR REVERSAL. NOUPHAN REPORTEDLY EXPLAINED THAT THE ORIGINAL DECISION TO REQUEST THE MENNONITES TO LEAVE LAOS WAS PART OF THE GOVERNMENT
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POLICY TO ASK ALL GROUPS IT FELT WERE "UNHELPFUL" TO LEAVE LAOS, SUCH AS HALF OF THE US EMBASSY AND THE US AND FRENCH MILITARY ATTACHES. NOUPHAN REPORTEDLY SAID THAT THE LPDR HAD CHANGED ITS MIND IN THE MENNONITE CASE AND NOW FFLT THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN CLOSE CONTACTS WITH AMERICAN BASED AID ORGANIZATIONS NOT SPONSORED BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT.

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2. IN ANOTHER CASE, HEIBERT TOLD EMBOFF THAT THE LPDR DID NOT RENEW THE CONTRACT OF THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL AID ORGANIZATION CANADIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OVERSEAS, DESPITE THE ADVICE OF DR. SOMCHIT, DIRECTOR OF INTER-NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WHO HAD ARGUED THAT CUSO AID PROJECTS WERE A VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO LAO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

3. NOUPHAN REPORTEDLY TOLD THE MENNONITES AND QUAKER REP THAT THE LAO GOVERNMENT FELT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WERE NOT CULPABLE FOR THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S PAST INDO-CHINESE POLICY AND THAT IT HOPED THE MENNONNITES AND QUAKERS WOULD BE HELPFUL TO THE LPDR BY SERVING AS NON-OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVES OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO LAOS.

4. IN THE ONE AND A HALF HOUR MEETING NOUPHAN REPORTEDLY SAID THE LAO GOVERNMENT WAS SYMPATHETIC TO THE GRIEF OF U.S. MIA FAMILIES AND HAD TAKEN STEPS TO COLLECT MORE INFORMATION ON U.S. MIA'S. HEIBERT TOLD EMBOFF THAT NOUPHAN HAD NOT MENTIONED WHAT THE STEPS WERE, ONLY THAT THE LPDR HAD ALREADY MADE ONE REPORT TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. (COMMENT: WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT REPORT NOUPHAN REFERRED TO. END COMMENT)

5. NOUPHAN SUGGESTED TO THE MENNONITES AND QUAKERS THAT THE LAO PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY THOSE LIVING IN THE OLD PATHET LAO ZONE, WOULD BE MORE DISPOSED TO SEARCH FOR U.S. MIA'S IF THEY WERE RECEIVING U.S. AID. HE CONFIDENTIAL

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TOLD THEM THAT HE HOPED THEY WOULD LET THE AMERICAN PEOPLE KNOW HOW BADLY THE LAO ECONOMY SUFFERED WHEN USAID ASSISTANCE STOPPED IN MAY, 1975.

6. NOUPHAN FURTHER SAID THAT THE LPDR IS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT EXTERNAL SUPPORT FOR LAO "REACTINARY ELEMENTS" AND HOPED THE USG WOULD NOT AID "THE LAO REACTIONARIES".

7. COMMENT: THE UNEXPECTED LPDR DECISION TO RENEW ITS WELCOME TO THE MENNONITES SEEMS TO HAVE LITTLE TO DO WITH THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF THE GROUP'S AID, WHICH WOULD AMOUNT TO $200,000 IN 1977. RATHER, IT APPEARS THAT THE LPDR DECISION CHANGE EITHER 1) WAS INTENDED TO DRAW A DISTINCTION BETWEEN OFFICIAL RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND UNOFFICIAL RELATIONS WITH THE AMERICAN PEOPLE FOR POLITICAL AND PROGAGANDA PURPOSES OR 2) WAS AN EXAMPLE OF BUREAUCRATIC TUNNEL VISION WHEREIN LAO AUTHORITIES, SEEKING TO IMPLEMENT A GENERAL

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POLICY TO ASK "UNHELPFUL GROUPS" TO LEAVE LAOS,
INITIALLY FAILED TO MAKE EXCEPTION FOR SUCH GROUPS AS
THE MENNONITES (OR QUAKERS) WHOSE LONG YEARS OF
OPPOSITION TO THE WAR IN INDOCHINA AND ONGOING
AID PROGRAMS MIGHT WARRANT SPECIAL CONSIDERATION.

8. THE DECISION ON THE MENNONITES WOULD ALSO APPEAR
TO LIFT THE CLOUD OVER PROSPECTS FOR THE CONTINUED
PRESENCE OF THE QUAKER REPRESENTATIVES IN THE LPDR.
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Message Attributes

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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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Subject: MENNONITE RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVES TO REMAIN IN LPDR
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